

WHENEVER the Army deploys to a world hotspot, air-defense soldiers are usually among the first to go. And with good reason — neutralizing the threat of attack by hostile aircraft or tactical ballistic missiles is essential whether the Army is engaged in full-scale combat, participating in peacekeeping operations or defending the nation against terrorist attack.

And few military forces are as well equipped for the air-defense mission as is the Army. From short-range systems like the shoulder-launched Stinger to the long-range and combat-proven Patriot, the Army's air-defense weapons and sensors have stood watch from the deserts of the Middle East to the streets of Washington, D.C.

It's no wonder, then, that the Army strives to produce the world's finest air-defense soldiers. And according to most air defenders, that's a task for which the wide-open spaces and uncrowded skies of Texas are ideally suited.

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A Patriot missile downs a target during a test on Fort Bliss's McGregor Range. Training conducted at the Texas post ensures Army air defenders are ready to engage any airborne threat.

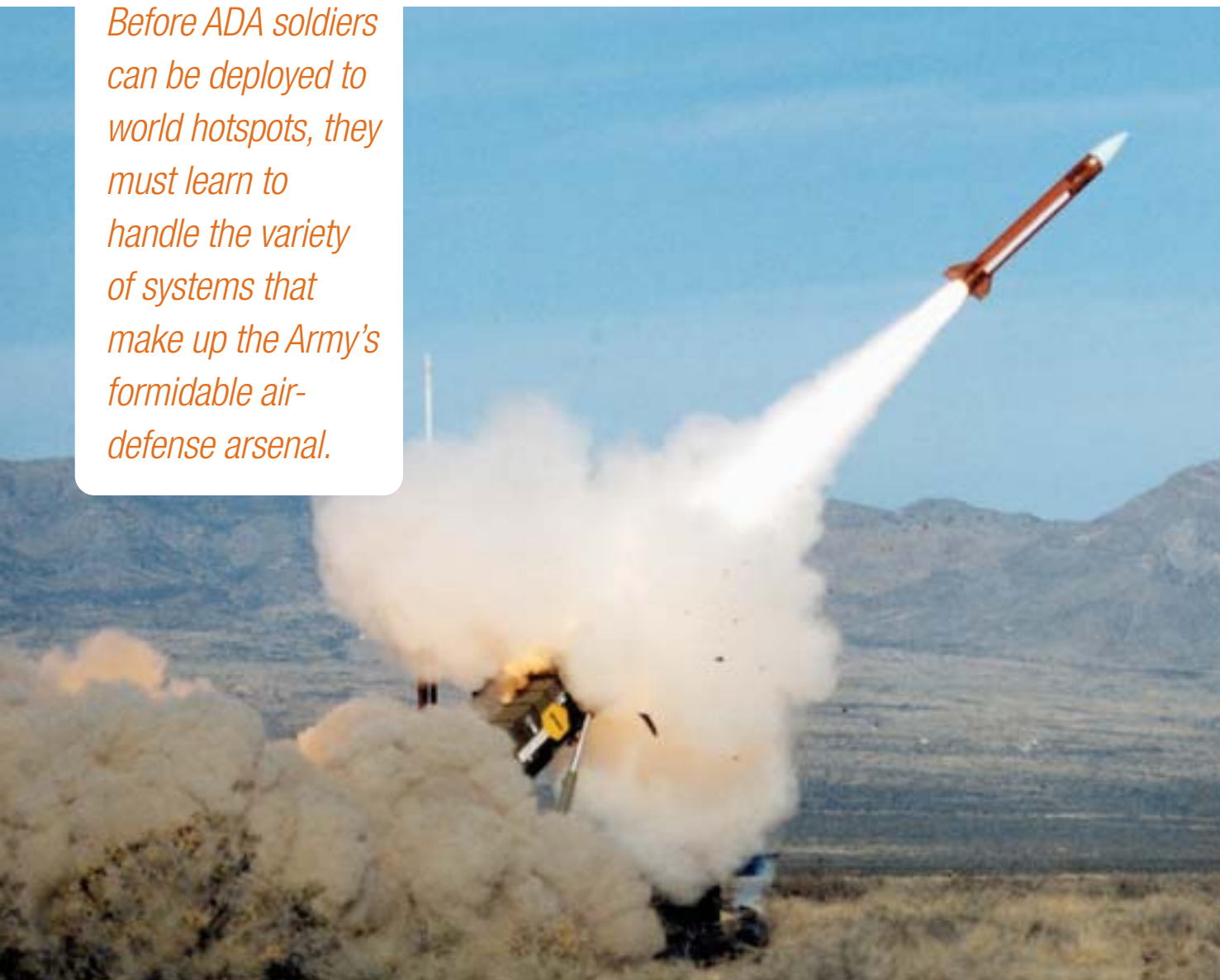
School for Air D

Defenders

Story by Steve Harding



Before ADA soldiers can be deployed to world hotspots, they must learn to handle the variety of systems that make up the Army's formidable air-defense arsenal.



At the ADA School soldiers learn to deploy and operate the long-range, all-altitude, all-weather Patriot.

Steve Harding



Use of ADA-specific simulators helps ensure comprehensive training in both the Officer Basic Course and Captain's Career Course.

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Home of Army Air Defense

Located in El Paso, Fort Bliss is home to the U.S. Army Air Defense School, the majority of operational Patriot units, and such other organizations as the Sergeants Major Academy and William Beaumont Army Medical Center. And, according to COL Wallace B. Hobson, it's the ideal home for the Army's air defenders.

"Fort Bliss is an extremely large installation, with more than 1.1 million acres," said Hobson, the post's former garrison commander and currently the Air Defense School's chief of staff. "It encompasses the northeast quadrant of

El Paso, but about two-thirds of Fort Bliss and its McGregor Range is actually in New Mexico. Of that total area, less than one half of one percent is environmentally sensitive. That means we can do everything from individual soldier training to brigade-on-brigade maneuvers.”

The post is also well equipped to support the frequent deployments of its resident ADA units, Hobson said.

“Fort Bliss has absolutely first-rate deployment facilities. We just recently opened a new departure airfield control facility, and because our Biggs Army Airfield has the third-longest runway in the country, we can handle the largest transport aircraft in the inventory — up to six of them at a time,” he said. “We’re also building a brand-new, \$24 million rail facility that will open in the summer of 2004.”

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≡ A Range of Weapons

Army air-defense systems provide coverage from ground level into the

high atmosphere, Hobson said.

“At the lowest level is the Stinger missile, which comes in both shoulder-launched and vehicle-mounted versions,” he said. “It’s a ‘fire-and-forget’ weapon that provides short-range air defense, or SHORAD, against such low-altitude threats as fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles and a limited number of cruise missiles.”

Referred to as MANPADS (man-portable air-defense system) in its shoulder-launched version, Stinger is also a component in the Humvee-mounted Avenger, Hobson said. The two-man Avenger system consists of a Humvee chassis mounting a rotating turret, which carries eight ready-to-fire Stingers and a single .50-caliber machine gun.

Rounding out the SHORAD line-up, Hobson said, is the Bradley Linebacker, a

standard Bradley fighting vehicle fitted with a four-round Stinger launcher and a 25mm chain gun.

At the other end of the spectrum is the long-range, all-altitude, all-weather Patriot system, which is intended to counter tactical ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and advanced aircraft, Hobson said. It was the Patriot and its associated radars that so spectacularly defeated incoming Iraqi Scud missiles during the Gulf War.



The Stinger missile is the cornerstone of the Army’s short-range air defenses. The six-week Stinger-only course includes both active-duty and National Guard soldiers.

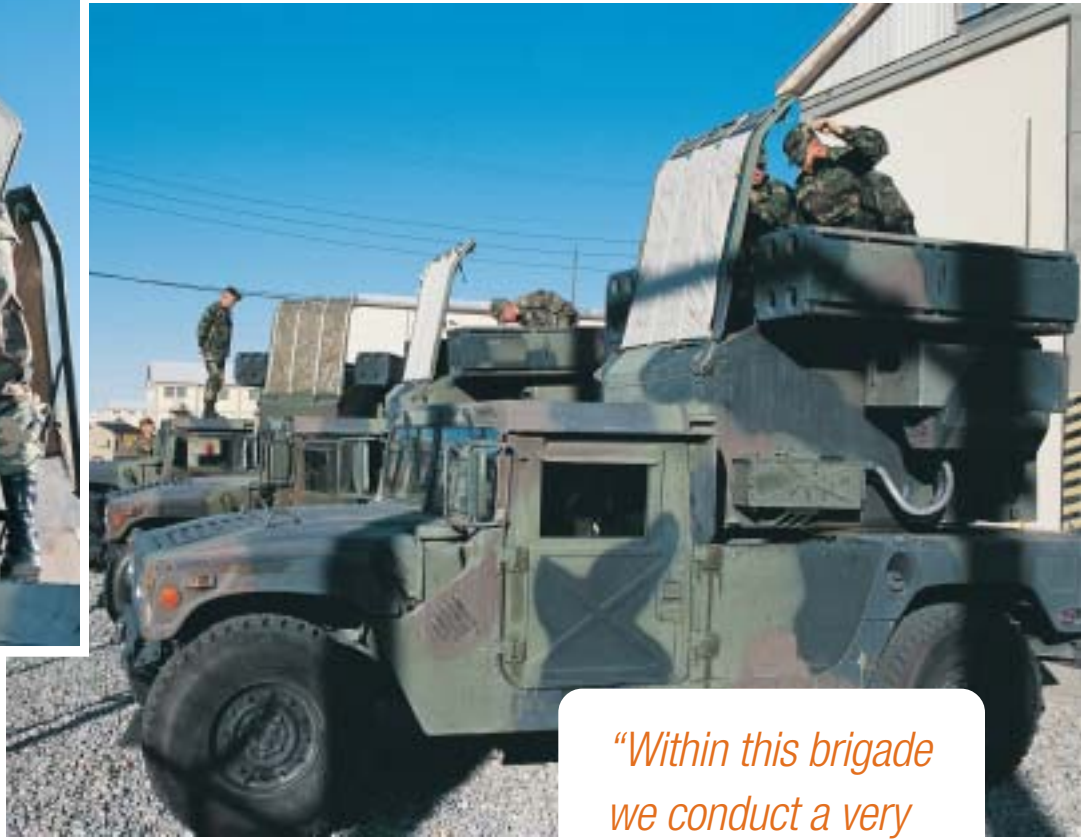
Steve Harding



With PT and breakfast over, members of one of the 6th ADA Brigade’s initial-entry training companies move out.



A student in the 10-week Avenger course removes a training round from one of his vehicle's two launchers (above), while other soldiers prepare their vehicles for the day's training (right).



"Within this brigade we conduct a very wide range of ADA training for both enlisted soldiers and officers," said SFC James A. Hartford, ... "And we don't think it's done better anywhere else."

Taken together, the Army's short- and long-range weapons and sensors form a sophisticated and integrated air-defense umbrella whose capabilities, Hobson said, are matched by the quality of the soldiers who operate them.

And creating those skilled and proficient soldiers is the mission of U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery School, or USAADAS.

≡ The ADA Schoolhouse

The USAADAS turns out both enlisted and officer air defenders. It offers initial-entry training for enlisted air-defense soldiers through the 6th ADA Brigade, and also conducts the ADA Officer Basic Course, the Captain's Career Course, the Pre-Command Course and the Warrant Officer Advanced Course.

The 6th ADA Bde. consists of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th battalions, as well as the 1st Bn., 56th ADA Regiment. The

latter is the initial-entry training unit for new soldiers destined for ADA MOSs, and includes a transportation unit — Company D — that trains the soldiers who drive the vehicles used by ADA units. The 6th ADA's 2nd Bn. teaches SHORAD, the 3rd teaches Patriot, and the 4th teaches the ADA brigade- and battalion-level pre-command course and conducts the security-assistance training program for foreign students.

"Within this brigade we conduct a very wide range of ADA training for both enlisted soldiers and officers," said SFC James A. Hartford, the 1st Bn. drill sergeant of the year for 2002. "And we don't think it's done better anywhere else."

≡ Enlisted Soldiers ...

Training for initial-entry soldiers entails a rigorous and comprehensive introduction to both the Army and ADA, Hartford said.

"This is the first exposure most of these young people have to the Army, and we want to instill in them the pride and knowledge that all soldiers should have," he said. "The training is not just ADA-specific, either. They learn all the things that every initial-entry soldier learns, no matter where the training is conducted."

Once through basic training, the fledgling ADA soldiers move on to

MOS-specific training in one of the 6th Bde. battalions. The length of the MOS course depends on the system, said SSG Roberto Sanchez Chavez of Battery C, 2nd Bn., 6th ADA, an instructor in the Avenger course.

"The MANPADS, Stinger-only course, for example, is six weeks, while the full Avenger course is 10 weeks," Chavez said. "In this course we get a mixture of active-duty and National Guard soldiers, and every student goes through the MANPADS section first. Then the active-duty soldiers and those from the Florida National Guard go on to the Avenger training."

Training in the 10-week Bradley Linebacker course is also split, said instructor SFC Barry L. Chandler, in that students learn both ADA and Bradley skills.

"Most of our students come here with an interest in armored vehicles, and we teach them how to blend the vehicle and the system into one complete battlefield package," said Chandler, of Btry. B, 2-6 ADA. "We're a division asset, and we go wherever the division needs us to be. We're mobile, but these soldiers learn early on that we're still part of the whole ADA team."

That team also includes a variety of radars and other sensors, and training for the soldiers who operate those systems also varies in length, said SFC Clifton Tucker of Btry. D, 2-6 ADA, the chief instructor in the Air Defense Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence course.

"The course is either 10 or 19 weeks long, depending on the particular soldier's intended assignment," Tucker said. "Those individuals who will be assigned to SHORAD units stay for 10 weeks, while those who will go to Patriot units are here for 19 weeks."

It helps, Tucker said, that most of his students don't arrive completely unprepared for the complex course.

"Most of the students are pretty well educated, and since this is primarily a computer-based system we get a lot of very computer-savvy

young people," he said. "They take to this MOS pretty quickly, because most of them have been dealing with computers for most of their lives."

From the students' point of view, the fact that all their instructors have real-world experience with the systems they're teaching is a major plus, said PV1 John R. Casterline, a student in the Avenger course.

"The instructors are all experienced ADA soldiers, so they know the topic inside and out," Casterline said. "They know how to teach you what you need to know. There is a fair amount to learn, but they present it in a way that is easy to digest."

≡ ... And Officers, Too

The training provided for ADA officers is equally as comprehensive

(Right and below) A student practices erecting the AN/MPQ-64 Sentinel radar. The compact system is the primary ADA sensor in the forward battle area, and provides early warning and target data to weapons such as the Bradley Linebacker, Avenger and MANPADS.



Steve Harding (both)





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(Right) Soldiers prepare a Patriot launcher and other equipment for shipment to the Port of Beaumont, Texas, for onward transportation overseas. Fort Bliss-based ADA units routinely deploy abroad.

(Above) And among the places they deploy to is Kuwait, where the Patriot launcher seen here is one of several protecting a key installation.

and just as well presented, said LTC Chris Moylan, commander of 4th Bn., 6th ADA. And with good reason.

“Air defense is a tremendously complex form of warfare, and ADA officers at all levels have to be proficient both as military leaders and as technical experts,” Moylan said. “Continuing education throughout an officer’s career is key, and we offer programs here for officers from lieutenant through lieutenant colonel.”

But in many ways, Moylan said, it’s the first level of training — the ADA Officer Basic Course — that’s the most important.

“Young lieutenants can be handed a tremendous amount of responsibility, in that they must know both the technical aspects of the ADA system and also know how to undertake staff-officer duties at the battalion level,” he said. “We make a point of mentioning, for example, that in Afghanistan the first air defender on



“As Sept. 11 showed us, the threat of air attack — anywhere, anytime — is one we have to take seriously.”

the ground was a first lieutenant from the 10th Mountain Division. When you tell incoming young officers that, it really opens their eyes.”

The school runs four OBCs a year, with between 70 and 100 lieutenants in each, Moylan said. Each OBC is conducted in two phases: The 10-week common-core phase covers doctrine, leadership, administration, logistics and threat organizations,



while the 10-week weapon-specific phase teaches basic system skills and tactical knowledge, and how to apply the skills doctrinally.

“Our mission is to produce lieutenants who are technically and tactically competent, have the ‘warrior ethos’ of an infantry or armor officer, and have the skills of a staff officer,” Moylan said. “We concentrate on preparing these

officers as completely as possible for the jobs they’ll do when they leave here.

“And it’s important that they and all air defense soldiers be as prepared as we can make them, because defending our soldiers and our nation is a real-world mission,” Moylan said. “As Sept. 11 showed us, the threat of air attack — anywhere, anytime — is one we have to take seriously.” □

For more on Fort Bliss and the U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery School, visit www.bliss.army.mil.

